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Department of Correction Research and Planning Division Age of Custody Population 1998-2007

December 2007 • Number 1

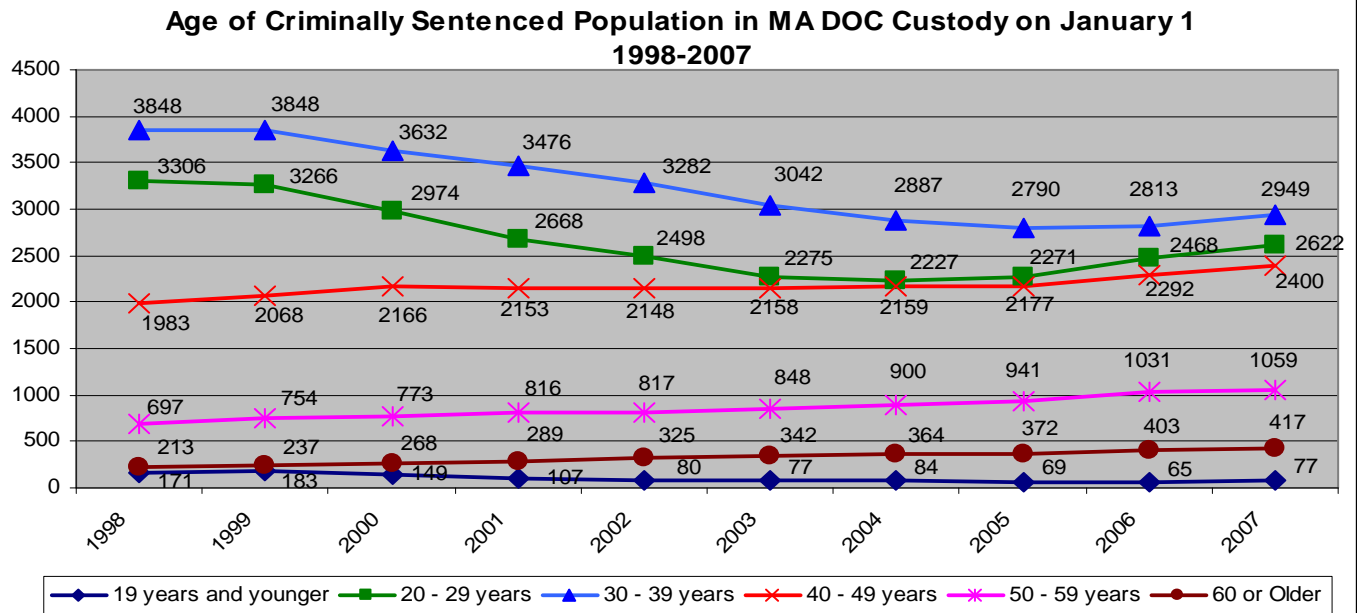


Introduction

There has been considerable discussion in the correctional literature about the “graying” of America’s prisons. As the population of the United States as a whole has aged, particularly with the shifting demographics of the “Baby-Boom generation”, and differences in crime and sentencing trends in the 1980s and 1990s, the number of elderly and infirm inmates has increased dramatically in State prison systems in the United States¹. As the age of the correctional population increases, there are corresponding increases in costs, programs and changes in management strategies which must be addressed². This research brief details the population trends of the age of offenders serving criminal sentences on January 1st within the Massachusetts Department of Correction over the period 1998–2007 as well as the age of offenders who are new court commitments to MA DOC from 1998-2006. In examining both populations, particular attention is paid to the significant changes in age that are occurring.

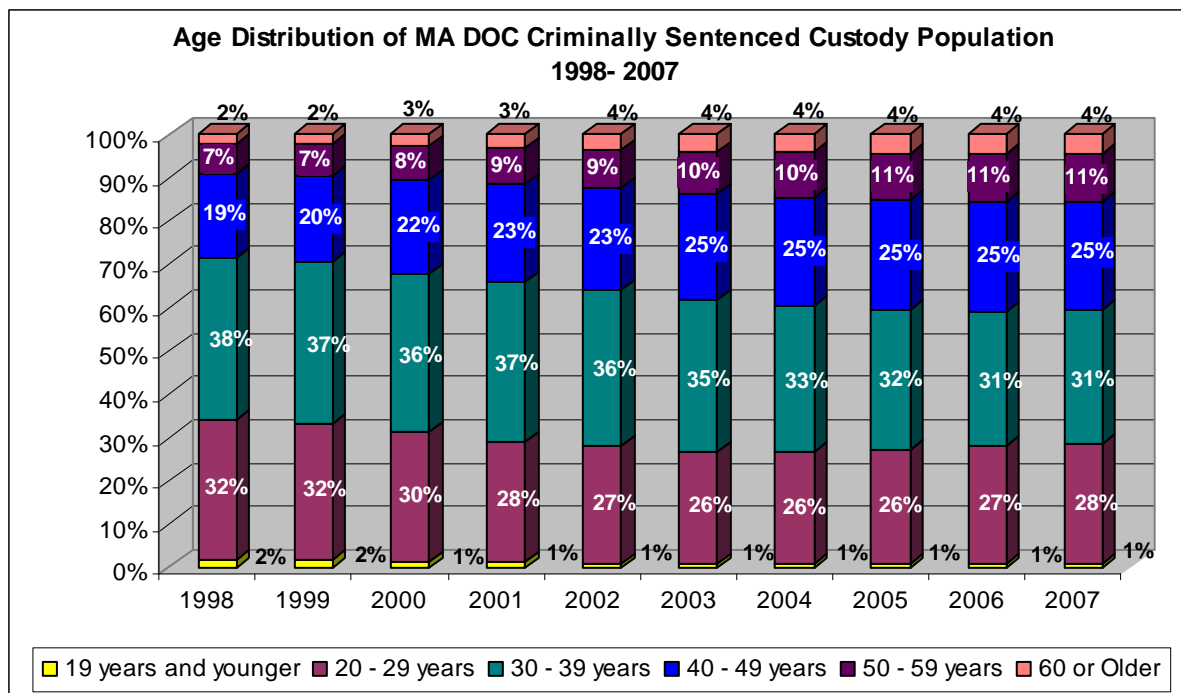
Age of MA DOC Custody Population 1998- 2007

In the 10 year trend period 1998-2007, there has been a noticeable shift upwards in the age of the MA DOC Custody Population of criminally sentenced inmates. Through the data it is evident that inmates are getting older in both number and proportion.



Source: MA DOC

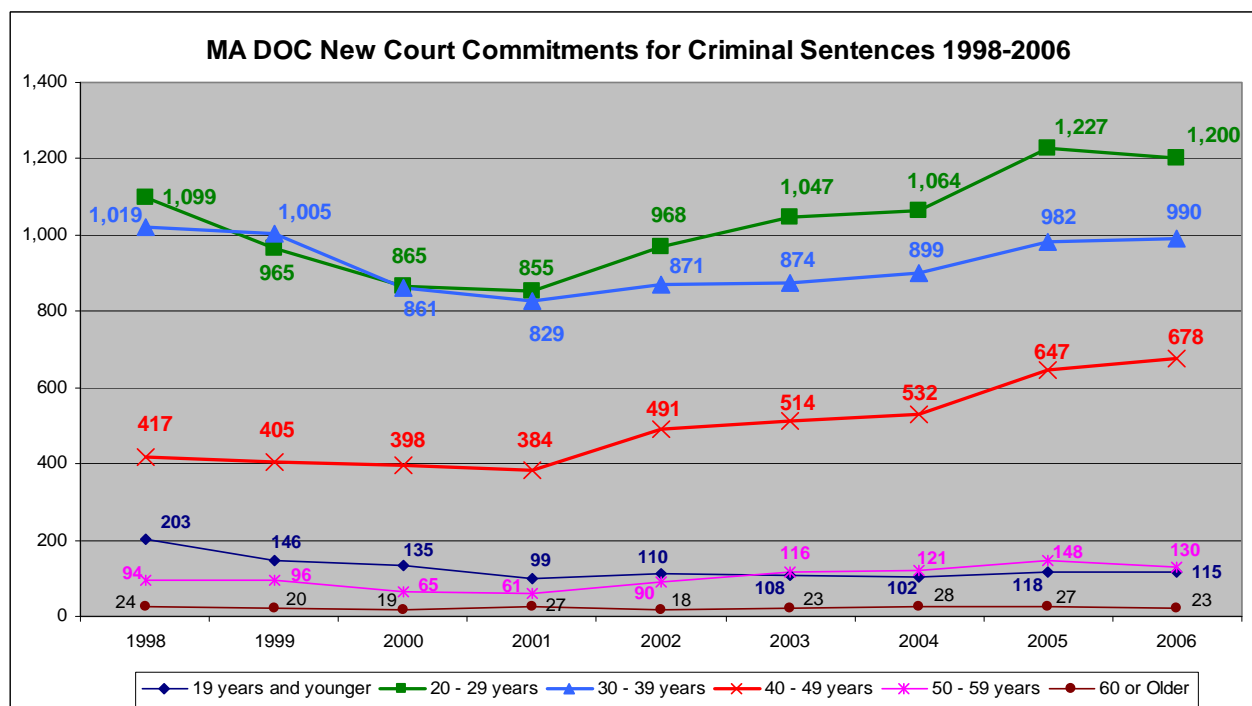
- During the period 1998-2007, inmates age 40 years or older experienced a significant increase in number. The age ranges of 40-49 years, 50-59 years, and 60 or older increased throughout the trend period by 22%, 52%, and 96%, respectively.
- Throughout the trend period, the majority of inmates were between 20-39 years old. However, from 1998 to 2007 inmates 20-29 years of age and 30-39 years of age decreased by 21% and 23% respectively.



- Since 1998, the largest decline as a proportion of all MA DOC offenders occurred within the 30-39 year age category; from 38% in 1998 to 31% in 2007.
- In contrast, the age group of 40-49 years experienced the greatest increase throughout trend period from 19% in 1998 to 25% in 2007.
- The proportion of inmates in the age categories of 40 years or older increased 28% in 1998 to 41% in 2007.

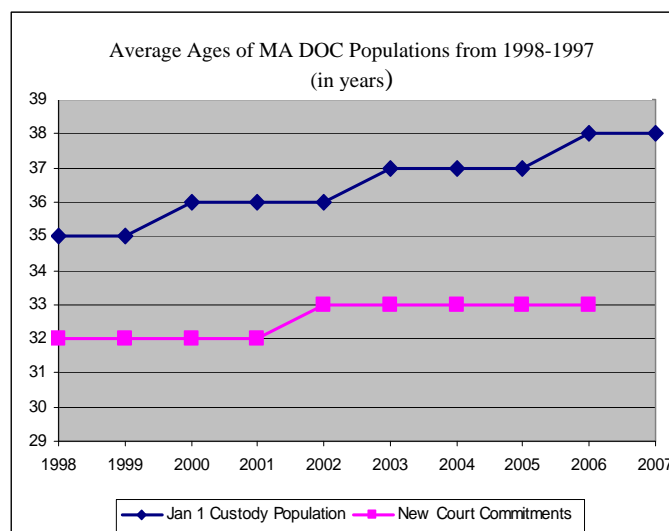
***Age of MA DOC
New Court Commitments
1998-2006***

When examining the MA DOC *new court commitment* population from 1998-2006, similar age trends to those illustrated in the Jan 1 snapshot population are evident. Though inmates aged 20 -29 years of age occupy the greatest number of new court commitments, it is apparent that the number and proportion of inmates 40 or older has increased at a greater rate than those less than 40 during the trend period.



- During the trend period of 1998-2006 the greatest increases occurred in the number of commitments for inmates age 40-49 and 50-59 which increased 63% and 38%, respectively.
- Inmates age 20-29 years old represented the greatest number of new court commitments and increased 9% during the nine-year trend period.
- Though the age group of 30-39 year olds had an overall decrease of 3% from 1998-2006, since 2001, 30-39 year olds have experienced a 19% increase.
- Proportionally, inmates age 40 or older have increased from comprising 19% of the new court commitment population in 1998 to 26% in 2006.

Changes in the Average Ages of MA DOC Custody & New Commitment Criminally Sentenced Populations



- The average age of the custody population rose from 35 to 38 years of age during the period 1998– 2007.
- During the trend period, there was a slight increase in the average age of *new court commitments* from 32 to 33 years old.
- The range of ages of MA DOC custody population varied throughout the trend period. The largest age range occurred in 1999 (16 to 92 yrs).
- The range of ages also fluctuated for new court commitments. The largest age range occurred in 2002 (16-85 yrs).

Summary & Implications

- Though the MA DOC criminally sentenced custody population has experienced a 7% decrease during the 10 year trend of 1998-2007, inmates aged 40 or older increased 34% during the trend period.
- Similarly, when examining data on *new court commitments*, the greatest increases occurred in the 40-49 and 50-59 age categories. Inmates in the categories 40-49 and 50-59 increased 63% (from 417 to 678 inmates) and 38% (from 94 to 130 inmates), respectively. **However, despite these increases, in 2007, inmates under the age of 40 represented 74% of all *new court commitments* to the MA DOC.**
- As a result of the continued upward shift in MA DOC population age, the MA DOC has become taxed in areas of medical, mental health, and programmatic resources. In turn, the DOC continues to reevaluate its programs and services to accommodate the shifting demographics and needs of an aging population.

¹ B.J. Anno, C. Graham, J.E. Lawrence & R. Shansky, (2004). *Correctional Health Care: Addressing the Needs of Elderly, Chronically Ill, and Terminally Ill Inmates*. Middletown, CT: Criminal Justice Institute, Inc. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at <http://www.nicic.org/Library/018735>.

² See R. Garden. (2004). The Graying of America's Prisons – Budgets. *CorrectCare*. http://www.ncchc.org/pubs/CC/aging_inmates_budget.html

This report was written by Christopher Calia, Research Analyst I with data from the DOC Inmate Management System (IMS). All other publications available from the DOC Strategic Planning and Research Division are available on the DOC's website: www.mass.gov/doc. Paul Heroux, Director of Research and Planning may be reached if there are any comments or questions that need to be addressed by e-mail: Research@doc.state.ma.us.